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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: HOW TO STEAL AN ELECTION, ALBANIAN STYLE

REF: A. TIRANA 392
[1](#)B. TIRANA 247 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN L. WITHERS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Although the conduct of Albanian elections has shown steady improvement over the years, ODIHR election assessments since 1996 read at times like a how-to guide for flawed and rigged elections. Allegations of vote buying, bribery of electoral commissioners, fraudulent voter IDs, voter intimidation, and even violence have marred many previous elections. Although this election cycle has been fairly quiet so far - both ODIHR interim assessments have been generally positive - members of the opposition Socialist Party (SP) allege daily that the ruling Democratic Party (DP) is planning to steal the election (but offering little evidence to back the claim). The ruling Democratic Party (DP) also alleges fraud on the part of the SP - also with little supporting evidence. In order to get a better feel for what form these "frauds" might take, Post spoke with several SP and DP candidates, and civil society representatives to get a better feel for what a rigged election might look like. It is important to note, however, that ODIHR and other observers have seen no credible evidence as of yet of concerted plans or efforts to manipulate the upcoming parliamentary elections by either side. Sadly, as this cable was being drafted, a DP activist was killed by an SP activist with an AK-47 outside of Durres in a squabble over campaign posters. PM Berisha and SP Leader Edi Rama both condemned the act and appealed for calm. End summary.

It All Began in 1996. . .

[1](#)2. (C) The blatantly rigged 1996 parliamentary contest marks the low point for Albanian elections. Marred by serious irregularities including violence, ballot stuffing, police intimidation of opposition candidates and incompetent election administration, the elections were a disaster, and led in part to the collapse of civil order one year later. The masterminds of the rigged 1996 Democratic Party victory were then-President (now PM) Sali Berisha, and then-Ministry of Interior official (now Deputy Interior Minister) Ferdinand Poni. The fact that Berisha is once again the head of government, with Poni now in charge of ID cards, has many in the SP worried that history will repeat itself with these elections. In a sad development that occurred as this cable was being drafted, a DP activist was shot and killed by an SP activist in a dispute over campaign posters near Durres. Both PM Berisha and SP leader Edi Rama have condemned the act and appealed for calm.

JUST DROP THIS BALLOT IN THE BOX PLEASE

[1](#)3. (C) One tactic, used both in Albania and around the world

to rig elections, is known as "carousel voting" and goes like this: early on Election Day morning, one "militant" will remove an empty ballot from the polling center. (Note: Militant is the preferred nomenclature for hardcore party activists or anyone involved in electoral mischief. End note.) This militant will then fill out the ballot with a vote cast for whichever party he supports. He will then give the ballot to a prospective voter outside the voting center and promise him ALL 5,000 (USD 50) if he puts the completed ballot in the box and returns the empty blank ballot issued to him in the voting center to him. The process is repeated throughout the day and across the country. In other versions of this scheme, less charitable militants will not offer you money but will threaten to beat you up or cause you to lose your job if you do not comply with the plan. This plan is practically foolproof as you are handing someone a previously completed ballot and receiving the empty ballot back, thus not allowing for any deviation once in the ballot booth.

WOULD YOU LIKE A BALLOT WITH YOUR PIZZA?

14. (C) Another technique, used to great effect in prior elections, according to some of Post's contacts, is to have filled-in ballots delivered with pizzas to counting centers on election day. These ballots are then dropped into the ballot boxes and counted as valid votes. Apparently no one checks if a polling center counts more votes than there are people on the voter registry, however this could change this year. Commissioners have also been known to receive "fees," sometimes up to EUR 500, to "close their eyes" for several minutes during the counting process to allow the militants to do their dirty work. Video cameras have been mandated by the new electoral code to combat this type of behavior, but it is easy to imagine them being switched off briefly, someone "accidentally" blocking the camera, or tricks being pulled outside of the cameras' view. Both parties this year have alleged that the other side is bribing or planning to pay off electoral commissioners this year, although no one has yet offered any proof of said scheme.

MY NAME IS EDI OR BARDI OR VJOSA OR ARDI

15. (C) Yet another ploy is multiple voting. According to this scheme, someone will try to vote several times in a district or region using the same identity papers. A bit more complex are schemes where people could obtain multiple voter IDs. Under this plan, militants will apply for and receive IDs for people who are known to be out of the country, are dead, or are not planning to vote for whatever reason. The IDs will all have the same picture on them, matching the militant's face, but will have different names and personal information. Although the SP firmly believes that such a scheme is possible, IDcard producer Aleat and the Interior Ministry claim it is not, and point to the fact that biometric controls on the new ID cards have stopped at least eleven attempts by voters to get multiple IDs using phony identification documents.

16. (C) Nevertheless, manipulation of the ID cards remains the SP's biggest single worry next to the large-scale disenfranchisement of non-passport holders (reftels). A senior SP official told PolOff on June 11 that the GOA had purposely delayed the rollout of ID registration centers in "five key areas." The delay, he alleged, is causing a last-minute rush for IDs in those areas, and the better-organized, better-funded DP is in a stronger position to get IDs quickly to its supporters, while SP and other voters struggle. But on June 11 a DP official told PolOff that SP local officials were purposely hindering the issuance of ID cards to voters in parts of Tirana. Neither the DP nor SP officials offered any proof to back their claims.

SEE, I VOTED DP! DON,T FIRE ME!

17. (C) The current Albanian patronage system is so entrenched

at all levels that it often leads to voter intimidation. For example, it is possible for a janitor in a school in Elbasan to lose his job if the government changes. In the past, state and municipal employees have been routinely forced to attend campaign rallies, do campaign work, or vote for a certain party or risk losing their job. In previous elections some voters even photographed themselves with their completed ballot in order to show it to their superiors at work to prove their loyalty. The threat of losing one's job for not voting properly is quite real and one SP candidate said her mother would vote DP just to prevent the havoc that is caused when a new government comes to power. To add to the confusion, although the Democratic Party controls the central government, many local governments are controlled by the SP or even the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), meaning civil servants can be subject to pressure from any party, depending on where that employee works. ODIHR's second interim report said ODIHR has received numerous unverified reports of pressure on state employees and even school children to attend DP rallies around the country.

18. (C) COMMENT: Certainly the main burden in ensuring a good election falls on the GOA. However, none of these unsavory tactics are party specific, and could be and have been used in the past by any party in an attempt to gain an advantage. This year both parties have pledged to run a clean campaign, and PM Berisha has repeatedly "guaranteed" to all who will listen that this year's election will be Albania's best ever.

However, the stakes are very high for PM Berisha this election, particularly with the persistent rumors concerning the involvement of members of Berisha's own family in the Gerdec scandal. The winner take all atmosphere that is Albanian politics also does not help matters and probably encourages illicit behavior. Furthermore, while party leaders might not condone fraudulent activities, mid-level hacks looking to make a name for themselves could attempt to pull some shenanigans. Although ODIHR has seen little so far to indicate widespread fraud by any party, the potential is real, particularly given past deeds by both major parties. The more than 3,000 observers will need to be paying close attention on election day.

WITHERS